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ABSTRACT

The role of Polish rural women in the family and in the community is what the African peoples and governments are doing about them. It is stated categorically that a problem does exist. Indicators often used to deny this industralization of agricultural regions, the activity of public organizations, and the development of cultural-educational institutions. Also discussed are factors influencing positive changes in a rural woman's life. These factors include new patterns of matrimony; a new attitude towards procreation; growth of their authority, especially if the husband undertakes employment outside of agriculture; gradual elimination of the self-sufficient household economy; an increasing process of mechnaization; and access to rural women of schooling and extramural education. (NQ)

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# THE ROLE OF RURAL WOMEN IN THE FAMILY

The desire to improve the situation of women occupies the centre of attention today in Poland as everywhere in the world. The statement that working women, particularly those with large families, are overworked has become a truism. But it is not generally known that the life of rural women is much more difficult. The changes in the Polish family and in the woman's social functions in the last 25 years have been the subject of ceaseless scientific research. The Institute of the Development of the Village and of Agriculture at the Polish Academy of Sciences has made a considerable contribution in this field. The research conducted there is the basis for the generalizations of the present paper. The findings of that research indicate a great gap in living conditions between urban and rural women, due to the differentiation of their respective economic and social conditions and to the differing family patterns.

It may be asked whether the rural family today is subject to the same processes of change as the urban family. The answer would be complicated. For rural women are under the influence of traditional patterns of life and work on the farm, which springs from an attitude shaped over many centuries that land is the absolute value. But they are at the same time subject to the influence of factors stemming from the city which revolutionize the life of the rural family. In the clash of cultures and systems of values the rural woman is daily confronted with the difficult problem of choice between the good of the farm and her own welfare. This is why the woman's question in general and the question of the woman on the farm are two different matters. While in relation to the urban woman the question is one of emancipation in the sphere of vocational and intellectual equal rights, in respect to the rural woman it is still a matter of breaking down the traditional barriers of prejudices and standards, of the aspiration to one day free herself from the archaic system of relationships.

The pre-war peasant generation considered the land and farm as the highest value. This attitude, flowing from the economic structure of the Polish village, designated the role of women, absolutely subordinated them to the "regime of the farm" and turned them into an element of production. Woman's social isolation, deepened by the endogamic tendencies of peasants' marriage, limited to the minimum woman's sphere of ac-

tivity and introduced an outright division into male and female spheres of culture, interests and activity.

The modern woman continues to be subject also to the influence of historical conditioning, despite the great changes we deal with later. Prior to 1939 Poland was among the most densely populated agricultural countries. Thus in 1931 there were 75 persons per ha of disposable land for whom agriculture constituted the only source of maintenance and 105 persons per 100 ha of arable. Agrarian overpopulation, the accompanying fragmentation of farms, the low levels of technical equipment and of productivity- all this found reflection in the great differentiation of living standards of the various groups of the rural population.

Demographic pressure which created a marginal, redundant population unable to find employment in non-agricultural branches of production, effected a permanent hunger for land as the only means of existence and in the emergence of ever sharper struggles for its possession.

The violent evolution impelled by the war, the changes in the social structure and technical transformation that followed could not but introduce new elements in the life of rural women. With the economic and social changes commenced the process of the cultural transformation of the rural community, which effected basic changes in the position of the rural woman. But the integration of cultures and customs does not proceed rapidly and without conflict. The different tempo of change in the rural as compared to urban areas is conditioned by their different starts. And the direction of change in the former is limited by the fact that the peasants' petty commodity production must after all remain in contradiction with the conception of modern life. The development of social awareness, changes of attitudes and customs in the whole complex psycho-social structure of the rural community-its women included- trail behind the penetration into the village of the mass media and consumers' durable goods.

A statistical evaluation of the advances of rural women, without interpretation, without indicating the difficulties, complications and paradoxes accompanying the advance, would hence be misleading and without purpose. For though much has changed in the life of the rural woman, the prevailing pattern of her social role and position still differs greatly from the model suggested by constitutions' provisions.

Three factors exert a particularly strong influence on the situation of Poland's rural women: the industrialization of agricultural regions, the activity of public organizations and the development of cultural-educational institutions.

The industrialization process is accompanyed by a tendency to the feminization of the farming vocation. Whereas in 1931 the percentage of the population maintaining itself solely by agriculture amounted to 60%, it dropped to 47.1% in 1950, to 38.1% in 1960, only 33.5% in 1966 and stands at about 30% today. The changes in the population's vocational structure, resulting from industrialization, affect women to a much lesser degree. If occupation in agriculture in 1950 is taken as 100, then it stood in reference to women at 102 in 1960 and at 91 for men. The outflow of labour power to industry hence pertains chiefly to men. Women tend to remain on the farm thus

effecting the feminization of the farming vocation. This situation has undoubtedly exerted an essential influence on the changes in the position and role of women in the peasant family.

Public organizations play no small role in activizing the rural inhabitants, in revolutionizing their outlook and in providing them concrete aid in their work. The principal women's organization in the rural areas is the Circles of Rural Housewives which work in collaboration with the Agricultural Circles. Their number has been growing year by year: from 27,773 in 1966 to 30,508 in 1967, 32,154 in 1968 and over 33,000 in 1971. This necessarily means an increase in the number of members, which counted 890,000 in 1970. The Circles of Rural Housewives function in 80.6% of Poland's hamlets.

These Circles conduct varied activities. In 1970 they conducted 3073 kindergartens, 1040 playrooms, 4800 educational courses in hygiene, 11,673 courses in domestic economy including 7642 on family diet in which 253,787 people participated. Besides, the Circles of Rural Housewives secured the participation of as many as 135,726 farms in a contest they organized on cleanliness in the home and garden.

It may be emphasized, without citing more figures, that the activity of public organizations is a powerful force influencing the tempo of change in the lives of rural women. In the sphere of practical pursuits public organizations facilitate the adaptation of rural women to the basic changes in the structure of everyday life effected by industrialization and the cultural-educational revolution. What is the nature of these changes and how does the situation of rural women present itself?

Positive changes are observable in many spheres of woman's life. They pertain to new patterns of matrimony, a new attitude to procreation, growth of their authority, gradual elimination of self-sufficient household economy, a progressing process of mechanization, access to rural women of schooling and extramural education.

The new situation becomes evident from the time women get married. In the traditional system of rural relations marriage was often for the woman an unjust and humiliating transaction, for the highest value here too was the land. Marriage was as a rule consumated among peasants after consideration of family, economic and environmental interests. It was very often a trading agreement in which practical considerations were uppermost.

There is an improvement in the legal and social situation of rural women entering matrimony. This is more evident in industrialized than in agricultural regions. Because of the growth of gainful employment outside agriculture, the process of emancipation from the regime of the individual farm and from the dictation of relatives and neighbours proceeds more rapidly in the former. One expression of these changes is the couple's property consideration which is not based on the similiar size of the farms of the contracting families nor on the convenient location of the lands. Lack of land has ceased to be a criterion of negative selection of matrimonial partners.

Family compulsion in relation to marriage has considerab-

ly weakened. The weakened authority of the parents- formerly latent in their undivided rule over the land- is expressed in the lower age of marriage and declining difference in the age of married couples. Interference by the community has weakened to an even greater extent. An investigation of the selection of mates by territory and religion shows the rapid disappearance of many forms of endogamy.

Motherhood was another element which determined women's former negative situation. Bringing many children into the world burdened them with duties and responsibilities, chained them to chores which limited their mental horizons and warped the development of their personality. The idea of birth control has now penetrated the village causing a decline in the birth rate. In fact, the index of decline is greater than in the cities, but there is still a clear difference between fertility in the city and in the country, where that coefficient is much higher.

In the first post-war decade the necessity of recouping the biological losses caused the demographic process in Poland to develope not only spontaneously but also under the stimulus of state policy which provided economic incentives for raising the birth rate in city and country. But there was a great disproportion even then between the fertility of urban and rural women. This was associated primarily with the culture of sex life, with different views on the functions of the family, the level of medical care and with the pressure of factors related to worldview. When the cult of mothers rewarded for bearing many children came to an end, the coefficient of childbirth underwent a furher differentiation as between rural and urban families. The phase of birth control commenced later in the country, while the evening of the level and the shaping of a uniform model for all communities is a matter of the future.

The drop in the number of children per peasant family is not equal for all communities. That tendency is undoubtedly stronger in urbanized regions. The average for industrialized regions is three children per family. But deviation from the average is so large that it is not possible to treat a county as an uniform community in this respect nor to seek an explanation of this oscillation in social categories.

A clash of attitudes and contrary tendencies appears at the point of intersection of two economic and civilization systems. An element of conscious decision is beginning to shape-up from the conflict between the old and new standards. This is why the tendency is asserting itself, among others, of a drop in the birth rate in measure with the decline in the age group of the mothers. For the younger age groups have to a greater extent been embraced by the birth control movement. The smaller number of children borne by young women also results from the better knowledge of sexual matters and the acceptance of the urban pattern of co-living.

These tendencies may be said to apply on a national scale. Differences in the fertility index is already small between young women of town and country. But they very clearly rise with mothers past the age of 30. In that group the proportion of urban women who still give birth to children is small, but it is different in the rural areas. The spread between the indices for city and country rises in measure with

the successive birth of each child by women over 30: in the case of the third child-almost double and in the case of the eighth-by 4 times.

The factor differentiating views on the desirable number of children is no longer economic conditions and particularly not the size of the family farm. It is rather the new moral and civilizations pattern, the way of life, social security- in a word, the elements of life contained in the conception industrialization and urbanization. A lower birth rate was already observable in the preceding generation in suburban villages. This tendency is weaker in the present generation, when the catalyst of change is not only the proximity of the city with its entire complex of traits of the contemporary family model. It is also-or perhaps primarily, direct contact /by means of gainful employment and education/ with institutions which do not face the task of propagandizing the ideal of the small family, but is expressed in concrete aid in its realization.

A third element of change in the social position of rural women is the rise in their authority. Two closely interrelated factors have exerted a decisive influence on changes in the family structure and the division of roles. The first flows directly from the processes of industrialization. The constant migration to the cities, at first embracing the surplus of manpower and then also the indispensable hands on the farms, contracts the family working group. The location of industrial plants in agricultural regions intensifies the process of spatial mobility and facilitates the emergence of the category of a dual community affiliation, i.e., those who combine employment in town with residence in the country and operation of a farm. A second important indicator of change in the situation of women is the change in the cultivation structure, to the vegetable and animal raising type. The change in the main direction of production develops most sharply in industrialized and urbanized regions, more suited to the marketing of high quality agricultural produce.

Both these phenomena have their given social effects. There is a definite rise in the authority of women in the family. This does not result a sudden change of the men's attitude to the role of the wife as an equal partner but is the consequence of a determining economic situation. The husband's undertaking gainful employment outside agriculture creates a new economic necessity. The woman takes over the actual direction of the farm. If the rural woman's social position is measured on the scale of prestige in the family and community, then it must be said that this prestige is positively correlated with the farmer's undertaking work outside agriculture. The shift of one or both of the partners in matrimony to another vocational group changes the role of the woman in the family, raises her authority. Her sphere of competence and her range of decision making undergo a change. The fact that she contracts trade agreements, borrows machines from the Agricultural Circle, acquires investment credit, for breeding or equipping the home with modern facilities is a gauage of her authority. She reaches out beyond the family group. Formerly subordinated to the father or husband, deprived of the right to herself determine her fate, she now begins, as an equal of

the head of the family, not only to decide on internal family affairs and to participate in official deliberations but also to step outside in the name of the "head" and the entire family.

The differences in the position of the wives of farmers and of the wives of part-time farmers are an evident expression of the changes occuring under the influence of the factors transforming the social and occupational structures of rural families. Two further elements seem essential to an evaluation of that phenomenon: the age of the husband engaged outside agriculture and his place of employment. Observation suggests two conclusions in this respect. First, the changes in the role of the woman in the family develop more rapidly when the husband traveling to work belongs to a younger age group. The younger generation is marked by a greater elasticity of views and attitudes and by a greater inclination to changes which yield the village not only a greater cash income but which also bring new urban patterns in the sphere of interpersonal relations. Secondly, changes in the woman´s family role occur to a greater degree in the case of couples where the husband travels to work outside his permanent place of residence. Whereas those who work in production plants or institutions located within the village treat their wives considerably worse in respect to participation in management and decision making. In case the place of work is located at a greater distance from the home, not only the time spent in traveling plays a role but also the contacts in the new environment. This influences a much greater loosening of ties to the farm than in the case of employment within the village. The woman then becomes the actual manager of the farm and that changes her family status, making her an equal partner.

In the sense of the division of competence, the model of the peasant family approaches the urban model. The main determinant of change in the urban family is the wife´s gainful occupation. Whereas the chief determinant of change in the rural family is the husband´s employment outside agriculture. Both determinants effects the shaping of similar structural characteristics in the families of working women in town and in the families of part-time farmers in the rural areas. There is a clear differentiation in the division of labour between the three family categories: of farmers, part-time farmers and those maintaining themselves exclusively by work outside agriculture. Farmers' families still present many elements of patriarchal systems in which the deciding voice was always with the father or husband. The woman plays here a subordinate role. Whereas the two other types of families gravitate ever more toward democratic relations.

The division into spheres of male and female decision-making is delineated on this stage of family life. To the men still most often belong matters of trade and production, to the women questions of componionate life and upbringing, The use of family funds is shaping up on new principles. Two financial models of the rural family are observable: when agriculture is the only means of maintenance there is most often a common treasure; when there are other, or only other, sources of maintenance, the family funds are handled by the woman- which also attests to the extension of her sphere of competen-

ce.

A fourth factor conditioning positive change in the life of the rural woman is the tendency to limit the self-sufficiency of the peasant family. The household is to a considerable degree emancipating itself today from the status of an agricultural workshop. The family, as a vital group in rural society also constitutes, as is known, an economic team to a much greater degree than does the city family. The role of woman in this team is not limited to participation in vegetable and animal production according to the traditional division of labour. In the pre-industrial period women were responsible also for a broad range of non-agricultural production. The folk saying: "The peasant supports only one corner of the house and the woman the other three" characterizes the importance of the woman's work for the peasant family.

The development of industry took over part of traditional family production. It replaced the woman, in a certain sense, provided better and cheaper clothing, bed linen, food articles. A characteristic feature of industrial society is the factory production of consumers' goods of everyday use on the basis of a specialized division of labour outside the family. The same applies to a number of household services. The transition from a natural to a commodity economy which is characterized by the growth of employment outside agriculture and expansion of consumption goods production effected a basic transformation of the structure of the family group. The family lost many of its previous functions. It ceased to be a multi-branch workshop producing for itself the greatest part of articles of everyday use. It also ceased to be the only upbringing-educational centre. Its function of providing insurance to the aged and crippled weakened. Companionate life and entertainment moved outside the home and even beyond the circle of relations and neighbours. The growth of industry, which separated the spheres of domestic and vocational occupations in relation to the urban family, now effects also a change of relations between the farm and the household for peasant families. Because of women's gainful employment there is a shift in proportion between women's domestic and outside contacts in the urban family. Today the home absorbs to a lesser degree the time and interests of the mother co-maintainer of the family. The same phenomenon is gradually manifesting itself in the village, except that it is more complex here.

The natural peasant family economy was the basis for the labour relations in the village. Almost all their needs in the realm of clothing, household implements and other consumption goods were satisfied by their own labour which occupied everyone- from the children to the aged. Traditional farming methods were practiced in all of Poland during the inter-war period and even after. The traditional forms of raising agricultural crops and of animal husbandry commenced to be eliminated from the farm wife's time budget only in the last decade. This tendency first developed in suburban areas where the possibility of providing the family with foodstuffs frees the woman from making butter, sausages and baking bread. But as we shall see later, the elimination of self-sufficiency by no means signifies the disappearance of all forms of home manufacture.

The last manifestation of positive changes in the situat-

ion of the rural woman is her access to education. This is actually a separate question of great importance we only touch here in passing. There is considerable micro and macro research being conducted on the level of education of the youth. But there has been no comparative research on the educational level of different age groups of rural women. Some light on this question is thrown by the Diaries of Rural Women, 1200 of which were submitted at a contest organized by The Institute of Development of the Village and Agriculture. These show that ever more farm women have been acquiring a vocational and secondary education. A comparison of two generations shows a great difference between them in this respect. Of 150 women who submitted diaries, and were over 50 years of age, 11 did not attend any school. The rest, except for two school teachers, could at most boast of having completed elementary school. But the vast majority dropped out after the fourth, third or even second form due to poverty. Whereas women of the younger and middle generations had a different start. Of the total of 933 who provided this information 155, or 16.2%, continued post-elementary schools studies.

But the rise in woman's authority and prestige and access to education do not signify an improvement in her situation in all spheres of life, for they do not mean a decline in her productive responsibilities. On the contrary. There is a parallel increase of her burdenes. For the farm wife now works in many cases in the field and garden not only for herself but for her husband and children as well. Most generally, the additional labour burden of the modern rural woman is the result, as indicated above, of her husband's gainful employment off the farm, changes in the attitude to children and growth of the family's needs. On the back of the part-time farmer's wife falls the burden of the farm work, of marketing agricultural and animal products, household duties and care of the children. The woman ceases to be a helping hand in the family and is becoming its head and manager of production, but she is more than ever burdened with labour in different specialities. Here there has not been, like in the city, a division in time and space between domestic and vocational, professional tasks.

When the peasant family begins to base its existence on two equally important means of maintenance, the description "gainfully employed" does not reflect woman's actual status. There is no question here of a dual vocation, as is the case with the husband. It would be more correct to compare her occupations with those of a working woman engaged on many jobs, with the important difference that the 8 hour working day is not observed here. Gainful employment outside agriculture plays a deciding role in the range of woman's occupations. When the husband works off the farm the sum of the tasks performed by the woman on the farm is greater than those of the other family members. Even when the traditional division of labour breaks down, its adjustment to concrete needs and conditions of an agricultural enterprise does not mean a decline in the range of woman's responsibilities. True, she often takes the place of the husband in carrying out various activities, but she does more of them than under the previous system of relations.

The household chores also increased. As we saw, when the

husband goes to work off the farm the woman must at least partly take over his work there. Theoretically, she should do so at the expense of the household as is the case with married woman in urban families who go to work. But there is no correspondence here between theory and reality. The division of labour in the household between the partners in matrimony is more traditional in character than in relation to farm work. Old ways of thinking are strong here: the woman is relegated to the kitchen and procreation. Those women are in the worst situation whose husbands are engaged in non-agricultural occupations at home. Such husbands help very little with the farm work and share in the household chores in the least degree.

The relation of the men to housework requiring greater physical effort is not uniform. As a rule men in all family categories participate in such chores as carrying water. But this attitude is only universal in landless families or those maintaining themselves exclusively by farming. Whereas the husband's help in the heavy chores is much more rare among part-time farmers.

The question of the division of labour in the family is reflected in the diaries and daybooks of farm wives. On the whole women complain of too many tasks. A young woman going to live with her husband after marriage on his parents' 18 ha farm toils from dusk to late at night, rising at 3 in the morning, soon stops comforting herself with the high earnings. While writing with pride in her diary that they made 50,000 zlotys on rapeseed alone, she at the same time declares with bitterness: "What good is the property to me if we can't enjoy it... We can only think of love on Sunday... And I thought that marriage is only honey, only love". /Diary number 158/. There are further complaints of stingy husbands who keep the money under lock and key, don't want even to deposit it in a savings bank, saves it for the children. "But how does he know if there will be children? For he has no time for that".

If the entire time budget of the rural woman be divided into six parts, namely: field work, work in the garden, house chores, trade contacts, contact with institutions, free time occupations, then it turns out that household and family obligations, i.e., housework is the most important. While burdened with farwork, which reaches its highest intensity during harvesting, sowing or haymaking and digging absorbs all members of the family, the farm woman spends most of her time, on a yearly scale, on the household. This attests to the rank of this sphere of activity and to the approach toward the family model of many Western European countries, where the proportion of work input in the household is rising in the general time budget. This seems to contradict what was said earlier regarding the elimination from the time budget of certain occupations associated with manufactured articles and a self-sufficient economy. But it turns out that the elimination of the above does not reduce the sphere of household tasks.

It is difficult to enumerate at one breathe all these highly varied tasks, of which there are in general more than 100. The activities of provisioning and keeping the house in order, so familiar to town women, apply here too. But besides that chores appear which are characteristic for the rural community. For despite all economic and social changes the iden-

tification of production and household interests continues here. We thus find in the lists tasks connected with processing agricultural and animal products both for home use and for the market. However, as indicated, self-sufficient economy is on the whole becoming an anachronism on a national scale owing to the growth of industry which produces better and cheaper. The farm wife ever more rarely bakes bread, churns butter, prepares sausages, spins wool, weaves linen. But this does not mean that processing disappears from the time budget. At times it requires an even greater work expenditure because of the rising demand of the family in the sphere of provisioning and running the household. Women who don't bake bread or cake make preserves and jams. The contemporary peasant family is not satisfied with soup cooked once a day but demand a varied diet rich with time consuming salads and greens. The same pertains to questions of hygiene. Laundering is easier due to the washing machine but it is done more often and more painstakingly, for such is the desire of the new peasant family.

Mechanization in the village pertains primarily to field work. But gradual progress in this respect is visible also in the sphere of women's work. This doesn't change the fact though that the rural housewife works very hard. The seasonal nature of her tasks and the rhythm of labour in the garden exclude the possibility of adapting them to her will. Iron economic law necessitates constant alertness, multiplying oneself, doing two things at the same time, leaving a job only in order to return to it.

The extent of the woman's work in the household and garden or plot allotment also shapes a new attitude to the child in the peasant family. This is associated with the modern conception of life and work in the village. It gradually comes to a division between working time and leisure time. With the appearance of the latter conception the efforts of the family are concentrated on obtaining production results but also on reducing the production processes by better organization of the farm work. This new attitude to life and to farming cannot but influence the situation of the children, who benefit to perhaps a greater degree than the other members of the family from the new scale of values. The peasant family furthermore appreciates the meaning of education. This is why ever greater importance is attributed to the children getting an education and acquiring vocational skills, which is unavoidably connected with reduction of their work on the farm.

There is still another determinant of the child's position and conditions. In the traditional family model the child constituted the cheapest labour power, an indispensable element of production, and its value was the gauage of economic suitability. This conception has now undergone a thorough revolution, Although the individual farm, subject to iron economic law, continues to use child labour, the share of that labour in the production process is no longer a chief consideration while its sphere and range do not determine the place of the child in the family working team. There is a change in the attitude of parents to their offspring who are raised not only to successively look after the chickens, geese, cows and horses, but are to the parents an end in themselves and require warmth, concern and care.

The new attitude to the child is expressed in its being freed from an excess of production responsibilities, in assuring an education, in organizing rest and recreation, within possibilities, in care for its health. The alternative "whom to cure first, the child or the cow" is always resolved today in favour of the child. This is attested by the frequency of visits to doctors. It is the woman who most frequently takes over the traditional children's production obligations. It may be said in this sense too that her burdens increase as a result of the changed attitude to children.

It should be added that all these additional burdens are the price of modernity, but they do not break down proportionately to the strength and possibilities of all family members. The woman undoubtedly pays the highest price for her own and the family's advance. Although the socio-economic transformations enabled women to free themselves from male hegemony and assured them the position of partners in decision-making, the fact remains that they work the hardest and that her own advancement and that of the other members of the family take place in good measure at their expense.

It is true that the transformations have released processes of emancipation owing to which the rural woman is breaking out of the narrow circle of household-production interests, that her political awareness is aroused, expressed in her participation in public life. On the other hand, however, the burden of greater responsibility on the farm and at home as well as the rising needs of the family under the influence of urbanization hamper the development of her personality and make difficult her benefitting from the attainments of culture, despite the greater opportunities in this sphere.

There is thus observable an ambivalent attitude on women's part: they on the one hand desire to accept urban patterns and are, on the other hand, afraid to do so. For that in their conception would mean neglecting the production of the farm. This attitude is particularly glaring in communities where a real possibility appears to rise to the level of the city in the sphere of the facilities of modern industrial civilization.

Concrete postulates for improving the situation of rural women are being voiced by scientific institutions and public organizations. Organized child care in the rural areas is a condition sine que non of relieving mothers of excessive upbringing duties. State outlays on child care amount to several milliard zlotys annually. The child in the village needs other forms of care than his counterpart in town, if only for the reason of the different character of women's work and the different kind of health care needs. The village needs creches, kindergartens, summer care centres, organized colonies, camps and vacation places for rural children.

Social benefits for rural housewives also require much improvement. There are no statistics relative to the number of rural women-wives of farmers and part-time farmers- who benefit from free vacations or sanatoria. The fact that the number is very small is not due to their excellent state of health and the proverbial peasant brawn, but to various other factors which limit their utilization of preventive medicine and treatment.

The popularization of medical knowledge and expansion of medical care should be regarded as basic factors influencing birth control. Enlightenment activities, schools of health, courses, lectures and talks would help reduce the size of the peasant family and the birth rate. Services for the village is another provision in the improvement programme, primarily those which lighten women's work: laundries, bakeries, butcher shops and slaughter yards, clothes repair, home renovation, linen, underwear, tailor and stocking repair shops, etc. The number of these services continues to be below the rising demand.

Nor does the provision with rural retail outlets always correspond to modern demand. Rural women lose too much time in shopping trips to town to buy articles of prime need which should be available in village retail stores.

Labour saving facilities, such as: electricity, running water, central heating, bathrooms, etc. serve to raise the rural level of civilization. In this respect there is a sharp contrast between town and country.

The number, the state, equipment and personnel of the culture centres are not always adequate in the rural areas. They and the mass media will not contribute to arousing interest in and creating cultural habits if not supported by widely organized undertakings in the form of reduced price tickets for artistic presentations, adjustment of autobus schedules and transportation of villagers to the theatre, art exhibitions, concerts, etc.

Unfortunately rural women do not enjoy equal rights as yet. Their development is still hampered by the bonds of habit and belief, work relations and conditions of life, antagonism between their aspirations and the form of their realization. This is why the studies conducted by the Institute of the Development of the Village and of Agriculture at the Polish Academy of Sciences are of such practical importance. Aware of the imperfection and gaps in this research, we regard it as an introduction to more fundamental studies on the position of rural women and how to make their lives fuller and richer.

We are at the same time aware of the very important changes in the position of rural women in the community, despite the limitations and imperfections connected with family life. They have ceased to be overwhelmed by house work and passive, participate more in the life of the village and have in many cases become the heads of the family and directors of the farm. Their degree of initiative and involvement in community undertakings and participation in the activity of political, social and cultural organizations are an expression of their level of awareness and of their role in the local hierarchy of authority.

The fact that rural women have been reaching out beyond the bounds of the farm and the family is also a gauge of the attitude of the family group towards them. An ever wider participation of women in local government and public office is observable. The formerly traditional rural community accepts the fact that women are not only teachers and nurses but also physicians, veterinarians, zootechnicians, hamlet agronomists and

that they even occupy positions as chairmen of local Peoples Councils. The village acknowledges this when it elects women to government posts.

The woman's social position has changed not only in the family, but also in the community. A woman participant in the competition for diaries by rural women(organized by the Institute of the Development of the Village and Agriculture under the Polish Academy of Sciences) excellently characterizes this new status when she wrote:"No one says today about me: beggar, day labourer, scullion: today I am a citizen of the Polish Republic".